

THE OCEAN HABITAT

Learning Science Through Creative Movement

- Lesson developed by:** Kevin S. Warner
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- Targeted grade levels:** 2-4
- Dance objectives:** The student will demonstrate movement using a smooth, indirect quality, and a sharp, direct quality.
- The student will demonstrate understanding of pathways through space.
- Language Arts objective:** The student will use descriptive words to write about the ocean habitat.
- Science objective:** The student will demonstrate an understanding of the interdependence of plants and animals using writing and movement.
- The student will demonstrate an understanding of the natural cycle of the food chain.
- Materials needed:** Master journal/marker Blue streamers
Student journals White streamers
CD/Tape player Green streamers
Variety of music – styles and tempos
Camera for documentation
- Literature supplements:** The Rainbow Fish by Marcus Pfister
The Magic Schoolbus on the Ocean Floor by Joanna Cole
- Spatial considerations:** These activities are specially designed for the classroom, though a field trip to the beach or an aquarium would provide an ideal setting for the final performance assessment. Be sure there is an area of the room free of chairs, large enough to accommodate up to six dancers.
- Discussion about personal space should precede this activity. Dancers should be aware of this as they move in and around one another.
- Other considerations:** Music for the final projects should be selected by the

student choreographers. This is most easily done when the teacher asks for a description of the mood of the dance, and then provides four or five selections from which to choose.

This unit is designed to last for up to six sessions. It is developed based on the Learning to Read Through the Arts format, a national project of New York City Public Schools and the U.S. Department of Education.

Process:

The teacher begins this lesson by distributing student journals and introducing the Master Journal as a shared resource that will stay in the class reading center for reference. The first entry in the Master Journal is presented to students as the goals of the lesson:

Dance Aim: To explore the ways that sea animals and plants move

Reading Aim: To use details to describe the ocean Habitat

Science Aim: To explore the interdependence of plants and animals

Following this, the first lesson's vocabulary words are introduced via the Master Journal.

fluid	school (of fish)
pathway (curved, straight)	

Definitions are derived via class discussion and demonstration. Students should enter all vocabulary words in their personal journals, and write sample sentences, as well.

The following creative movement activity reinforces the definitions and concepts discussed by the class. In creating an ocean habitat, what animals/plants/creatures might move fluidly. Seaweed is certainly one. Select several students to become seaweed. Be sure the children "plant" themselves in the ocean floor, as they will become the set pieces for the dance and we don't want them to float away? Allow them to move fluidly in the water. Perhaps select some jellyfish, too, or whatever other fluid creatures the students can imagine.

Next, select several students to dance the role of ocean fish. Discuss the pathways the fish will have to take through space to get around the seaweed (curved).

Initiate a class discussion on the various roles of seaweed in the life of a fish – food, protection, nest, etc. Use some gentle, appropriate music as background for this activity, and cue the ending of the dance by fading the music.

The second lesson is designed very similarly, but should be layered upon the previous one by starting with the class's moving ocean habitat of seaweed and fish. One again, begin the session by introducing new vocabulary words:

current	predator
pounce	prey

Again, definitions are derived through class discussion and movement exploration. Allow students representing the *current* to use blue and white or green streamers as they move through the water. Discuss how the current affects the movement of seaweed and jellyfish, and demonstrate changes in the speed of the current. When discussing the word *pounce*, introduce the words *predator* and *prey*. This is a good beginning to a movement exploration of the food chain.

The next lesson involves the following guidelines for students (to be entered into journals):

Write a story about your favorite ocean creature.
Describe the animal and name it.
Describe where it lives.
Describe how it moves.
Describe where it is going.
Describe what it is after.

Select six or seven stories that lend themselves well to movement interpretation, and identify those six or seven as *choreographers*. They are going to direct a dance that will bring their story to life. Again offer the following guidelines:

Choose as many dancers as you need.
Have a beginning and an ending.
Select the music you would like to use.
Choose movement that will "tell" your story.
Direct your dancers.
Perform your story for the class.

The teacher takes the role of *producer*, overseeing the entire production – the person in charge. Allow students to enter the following vocabulary in their journals:

choreographer producer

Each choreographer needs to make a list of the roles he/she needs to cast, including children to represent seaweed, caves, etc. Be sure that every child is used by at least one choreographer. Assemble the small groups and let them work together to create the dance. Be sure the groups understand they are to take direction from the choreographer. This is an excellent lesson in group cooperation and team effort.

Most often, it works best to have the choreographers come to you individually to select music based on their description of the mood of the dance.

When finally sharing the dances, ask the choreographer to read his/her story either before or after the audience sees the dance. It is also fun to have them introduce their dancers and the roles they will play. Use the start of the music as the beginning of the dance, and the fading of the music as the ending.

Introduce the idea of a “critique” as part of the lesson, and be sure to distinguish a “critique” from a “criticism.” Did you like the music the choreographer chose? Did you understand the story, even though there were no words? Be sure to offer favorable comments after every dance, dancer and process.

Extensions:

Assist the children in creating their own simple costumes based on their role in each dance.

Encourage the students to compose music and accompany dances with percussion instruments, responding to changes in tempo, dynamics, etc.

Make connections with the story elements of plot, setting, climax, prediction, etc.